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Note by the President of the Security Council

At the solemn meeting held by the African Group and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Organization of African Unity to the United Nations in commemoration of Africa Day on 25 May 2002, the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the members of the Council:

"First of all, on behalf of the members of the Security Council, I have great pleasure in expressing my warmest congratulations and best wishes to all of you on the auspicious occasion of Africa Day. It is indeed a privilege to address this very influential and distinguished group. You are an important and significant voice here and play a crucial role in many areas of United Nations work.

"Africa Day celebrates African unity. It is being commemorated globally. We have not yet created a Security Council day. But the members of the Security Council remain united in their determination to help prevent deadly conflict and to secure durable peace in Africa. The members of the Council also attach great importance to cooperation and consultation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and subregional organizations as well as relevant United Nations bodies, including the Economic and Social Council, in their efforts to promote sustainable development in the continent.

"The Secretary-General's April 1998 landmark report on the causes of conflict in Africa and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development signalled to the Security Council the need for an integrated approach to peace and development. It called on the Council to address the root causes of conflicts. Endorsing those principles, the United Nations Millennium Declaration of September 2000 also contained a separate section calling on the international community to meet the special needs of Africa. There is now near universal recognition of those needs.

"It is indeed also very encouraging to note that important initiatives owned and led by Africa have also begun to emerge. Notably, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) represents the culmination of recent efforts to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path to sustainable growth and development and to plug into the global economy. That is a laudable initiative.

"As a continent-wide, comprehensive strategy at the political, economic and social level, NEPAD can help initiate the transition to the African Union.

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The proposed African Union is without doubt a bold but indispensable undertaking. As your respective Governments, regional and subregional institutions deliberate on the design and inauguration of the new pan-African organization, I can assure you of the full support of members of the Security Council.

"Once established, the African Union will be a milestone in establishing peace and advancing development on the continent. As the Secretary-General declared in his statement to the Summit Meeting of OAU in Lusaka on 9 July 2001, this historic effort will require leadership, courage and willingness to depart from the ways of the past if it is to do for Africa what the European Union has done for Europe and to rebuild, as Europe did, after a series of devastating wars, uniting across old divisions to build a continent characterized by peace, cooperation, economic progress and the rule of law. Overall, the signs are promising. A sense of renewal and partnership is being created, both among Africans and between Africa and the rest of the world. As an organization, the United Nations as a whole must build on this quickly.

"For its part, the Security Council has increasingly placed African concerns in the operational front and centre of its agenda. In the last decade, the Security Council's African dossier has increased quantitatively and in terms of the complexity of the issues handled. On average, the Security Council now spends nearly 60 per cent of its time on Africa. Half of all current United Nations political and peace-building missions are currently in Africa. In qualitative terms, the Security Council has begun to ensure that sharper focus is given to consideration of African issues.

"In that connection, an ad hoc working group on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa was established at the end of February 2002 following an open debate under the Security Council Presidency of Mauritius earlier in 2002. It is being ably chaired by the Permanent Representative of Mauritius, Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul. On 22 May 2002, the Council held a day-long public meeting on the ad hoc working group on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, Professor S. Jayakumar. As many of you are aware, the meeting was envisaged as an 'outreach' session, with the role, function and programme of work of the ad hoc working group explained to the wider membership, who also had an opportunity to provide their views and inputs.

"Many of you participated in the meeting. As a result, the debate was deep and wide-ranging, with a very high level of participation by the wider membership and high-quality interventions by the African Group members in particular. In all, 35 non-members spoke, with a number of Council members reacting in an informal way to help achieve a genuinely interactive debate. The high level of participation was an indication of the keen interest demonstrated by member States in providing inputs and recommendations for the Council's work on Africa.

"At the end of the debate, the Chair of the meeting summed up the discussion under his own responsibility by drawing oral conclusions to be fed into the future work of the group. The conclusions were divided into two parts, drawing out the general points made and listing out some of the specific suggestions made for the working group to pursue. The conclusions are

available on the web site of the Singapore Presidency, and will be circulated to the wider membership in a note by the President after it has been formally conveyed to the Chair of the working group. I want to assure you that members of the Council are committed to ensuring serious follow-up to the proposals made at the debate.

"In closing, on behalf of the members of the Security Council, I would like to thank you once again for your invitation to your commemorative meeting today. I would also like to reiterate the Security Council's strong message of support as well as its solidarity with you in the management of the challenges and the opportunities that face the continent."